



STRESS MANAGEMENT THROUGH YOGA AND FINE ARTS

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ABSTRACT

We always find ourselves in the world of previous experiences, or the things, objects and events with which we are directly associated. Our past experiences, thought processes and intellectual modes result in our pleasure, pain, sorrow, happiness, anxiety etc. Stress is caused when feelings are hurt, when past experiences, longings and desires stand in contradiction with present situations and circumstances. There is only one way to escape or avoid it. It is to tune up the mind during stressful situation and to enter in the world of feelings, imagination and joyful thoughts to achieve the state of ecstasy and oneness with the peaceful existence. This is where yoga and Fine Arts can work wonders. They have the penetration powers to the tangible courts of mind.

KEY WORDS: Stress, Yoga, Stress Response, Anxiety, Eustress, Distress

Introduction:

Materialistic world of today with its enticing promise of a lifestyle full of comforts and luxuries brought in with these a cut throat competitive work environment, death of emotions and betrayal of relations. The human race has surrendered its sordid boon to the Mammon- the god of wealth and in turn received physical comforts veiled in stress, strain, trials and tribulations resulting in frustrations. Man's journey away from nature disturbed his environment, and stress is the individual's reaction to this disturbance. Ivancevich and Matterson¹ believe, "Stress is the interaction of the individual with the environment". It is an adaptive response, mediated by individual differences and psychological process which is a consequence of any external action, situation or event that places excessive psychological and physical demands upon a person.

Stress is not always bad. When it is created to achieve successful effects, it is called 'Eustress'. Which is healthy, positive and developmental stress response? On the contrary when stress brings undesirable outcomes it becomes 'Distress' and is associated with heart diseases and other mental ailments. Stress is different from 'Anxiety'. Whereas anxiety is psychological and emotional but stress covers the physiological sphere also.

'Stress' is highly individualistic in nature. Some people have natural immunity towards a certain level of stress, they possess the required level to activate and channelize their energies. Some people have low level of tolerance towards even small stressors which paralyze their life. Stress is not always bad but it is the degree of it which produces positive or negative consequences. It is the personality of the individual that determines whether this stress response will become Eustress or Distress for him. Psychologists have categorized personalities in two categories. Type 'A' people are impatient, ambitious, competitive, hardworking, demanding but prone to stress including anticipatory emotions like anxiety. Type 'B' people are equable, calm, relaxed not overly ambitious and less at risk from stress. In contemporary society 'Distress' experienced by individuals especially of Type 'A' people have negative consequences for them, their families and society itself. For humans psychic trauma, caused by emotional disturbances resulting from some auditory or visual stimulus is the most common stressful situation. The effect of such psychic trauma can be greater than that of any type of physical trauma. It is the root cause of all stress disorders.

It is now well established that the brain with its known centres for sensory, intellectual and emotional functions plays the main role in maintaining a balanced condition of our body and mind by liberating required amount of neurohumors and hormones. Any disturbance of this homeostasis develops stress disorders.

Defining Stress:

Stress is our body's physical, mental response to circumstances that frighten, confuse, endanger or irritate us. If not handled properly it can cause diseases like high blood pressure, ulcer, asthma and overactive thyroid. As per medical explanation, stress is the body's general response to environmental situations that can lead to physiological discomfort, emotional unhappiness, and strained relationships with others.

"All sorts of glands secrete hormones: the secretion of some of them is turned on during stress and the secretion of others is turned off," Robert Sapolsky². It is well established by medical science that the brain being the master gland and its base the hypothalamus contains these releasing and inhibiting hormones, which instruct the pituitary, that regulates the recreation of peripheral glands³. When

we experience or think of stressful conditions, the hormones are released. After ACTH (corticotrophin) is released into the blood stream, it triggers glucocorticoid release in the body. Other chemical changes like the recreation of endorphins and enkephalin, production of glucagon in pancreas, secretion of prolactin in pituitary gland and many more become dangerous if not controlled. The continuation of stress creates the conditions for other ailments.

During stressful stage there is an increase in cardiovascular output. The blood moves faster with more force and raises the blood pressure. A continued stress response keeps the cardiovascular system in its heightened state causing depression, diabetes mellitus, some autoimmune diseases, colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, suppression of immune system and reproductive problems. It effects physically and psychologically.

Review of Literature:

Arpita⁴ in 1990 in her review of literature of Yoga Research in 1990 concludes that Hatha Yoga has potentials to check anxiety. In her review she emphasized that Hatha Yoga could be helpful to medical and psychological treatment when practiced regularly. It not only reduces the level of anxiety but also enhances the self-concepts.

K N Udupa⁵ in 'Stress and its Management by Yoga' claims to treat 1007 cases of various stress disorders with a combination of practice of asana, pranayama and meditation. He reports that the patients of high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma (early stages of) showed good improvement by yogic treatment.

Balmakund Bhala⁶ in 'Yoga in Modern Medicine' (1996) confirms, "Yoga therapy seems to be of great value for asthma, cardiac patients, multiple sclerosis, migraine, rheumatoid arthritis and rehabilitation".

Another study by N.K. Manjunath⁷ (1999) produced the interesting findings that fine motor co-ordination improved more for those who had volunteered for Yoga training.

Sheetal Sharma⁸ (2015) discussed the effects and the techniques to manage stress where she considers yoga, meditation hypnosis as some of the relaxation techniques in her research article "Stress Management- a Study."

Stress and Yoga

The chronic stress response needs a strong oppression from human mind. Yoga can provide a framework to modify one's behavior towards the acceptance of stress response. Barbare Stoller Miller⁹ writes in her translation of the Yoga-Sutra, 'The goal of Yogic transformation is realized in contemplative practice. The path to freedom consists of gradual unwinding of misconceptions that allows for fresh perception'.

In order to change the stress response it is important to become familiar with relaxation. Yoga trains the body to respond to the request for relaxation on a muscular level and breathing deeply creates a habit of relaxation essential to turn off the stress response.

In an article in Times Wellness (23-2-2007) Acharyashree Surakshit Goswami ji explains the benefits of Vaatkram Kapalbhathi how it helps to increase the power of concentration by removing the impurities from the skull nerves. It is very beneficial for the brain, lungs and heart. He clarifies how this asana along with other

breathing exercises combats with colds, allergies, asthma, depressions and insomnia (again another cause of stress). Similarly Dhruvasana improves concentration and stability preventing the mind from wavering.¹⁰

Researches proved that the toxins we inhale and consume daily affect us adversely. Ujjayee Pranayam, Bhastrika Pranayam and Bhramari Pranayam help to purify 72,000 naadis in the body, strengthen the nervous system, lungs and heart, curb hypertension, phobias insomnia and other mental disorders. Purification of blood balances the body's vata, pitta and kapha shielding from many diseases and depressions. Bhramari Pranayam especially counters mental problems like tension, stress, anxiety, insomnia and nervousness improving mental stability¹¹.

Stress management and Fine Arts:

Emotional unhappiness is the major cause of stress these days. Man is running day and night to achieve his goals set as level of success, but in the pursuit of this success he has sacrificed his relationship with peaceful existence. To have an escape from stressful life style man moves to Art Galleries, Mushayaras, and Musical Concerts etc. Aesthetical experience, while standing in front of a piece of art say a painting or a sculpture, takes him away from his self created jungle of stressful existence to the peaceful garden of emotions. "Feelings are aroused in the enjoyment of art" says P.C Chatterji.¹² When a person is joyful, he experiences this joy in his emotions and expresses it in his body in the form of art. To understand how a piece of poetry, musical notes, dance movements, painting or sculpture, affect our stress responses, we need to understand the process of their creation.

Meditation makes us observe our own self from within. This is what aesthetic experience also offers us, while standing in front of a painting or listening to a piece of music. It is another form of meditation, the elevation of the self from conscious to subconscious and then to super conscious levels. In this momentary journey all the stress responses that disturb us in our conscious existence find a betrayal in subconscious strata. This way the five senses of conscious existence and the elevator of the stress responses fail to disturb our peace of mind. Fine Arts or Yogic Meditation changes our perception of different situations we face. So the stress busters can't harm the nervous system of a person who is an appreciator of beauty.

Conclusion:

Human mind and body desire liberation from all bondages, all conditions, and all experiences that result in stress. But what we will face the next second in our life is not in our control. We can only develop our immunity and equilibrium to the various stress responses that we face and can manage to decrease their effect in our life.

Yoga and Fine Arts shelter us during the dark periods and help us to encounter the stressful conditions with ease. They help us in self-observation which is necessary to recognize and stop the deleterious effects of stress response before it harms our spirit, mind and body. The combination of breath regulations, physical exercise, meditation and aesthetic experience work as stress management intervention. They have no negative effects, however they may provide benefits in mood, quality of life and relief in other stress disorders.

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